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Dissertations
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XII.

Diet.

By

Henry Wyllie Edmund Matthews, B.A. Trin.
of New Haven,

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor in Medicine.

Diet -

A celebrated English Philosopher remarks
"that man acts more from habit than reflection" which
is in one sense equivalent to the old Proverb "Every man
for himself."

The Politician who in his zeal
for the dear people has not forgot to secure an
advantage more substantial than fame - will
when asked to define his position, retort with
the utmost coolness "every man for himself."

The Tradesman who with a conscience seared by
the insatiable love of gain - gives short measure
- light weight - and scanty change - is quieted in his
questionable honesty by the recollection of this
time-honored Phrase "every man for himself" -

The Emetic patient who petulently charges
the Practitioner with robbing him both of
health and purse, or the unfortunate client
that remonstrates with the Lawyer who sets the
oyster and throws him the shell. is answered
with dignified complaisance - perfectly right

"Quisque Sibi" "Every one for himself" -

And thus in every walk of life from the statesman to the mendicant, illustrations of this maxim are to be found. The lisp of Infancy & the trembling articulation of age both give utterance to its truth - But in nothing do men more uniformly exemplify it, than in the servile gratification of their appetites. Man should ever be the Master instead of the Servant of his propensities - the ruler of, rather than the obsequious minister to, his imperious stomach. Three regular meals a day, should content a judicious observer of health without filling in esculents at unreasonable hours as the morbid appetite may ~~crave~~ **crave**.

I do not mean to affirm that good living is injurious - but that Gormondizing is the generator of that most serious disease Dyspepsia -

This disease with all its attendant ills is making rapid inroads upon the human family.

And amid the diversity of opinion concerning rules and regulations of Diet - & in a day of puffed Postures and Pills, it may not be amiss to inquire

if there are no ~~grounds~~ against its prevalence and no light to be thrown upon its origin -

Some of our Transatlantic brethren gravely assert that it originated in Boston, a place far famed alike for its notions and for its lovers of Fat Goose and Roast Turkey. Others maintain that it existed prior to the dark ages, and was cured by charms and amulets.

If the lean kine of Pharaoh, or Cassius with his hungry look were not of this clod, I still incline to the opinion that it must have existed at a very early period. The habit is quite too common among men of imputing every evil to the degeneracy of the age. Thus some Pathologists assert that Monomania is a disease of the nineteenth century, not reflecting that the malady of Nebuchadnezzar was a well marked case of Monomania under the influence of which that King fancied himself an Ox and went into the fields to graze. It was a divine infliction ~~for his wickedness~~ it is true, and an exposter of the Scriptures ~~as~~ called it by the appropriate name of Lycanthropy. The symptoms of Dyspepsia will not be treated of in this Thesis as they do not belong to

our subject. It is well known that the Stomach assisted by the gastric juice is the chief organ of digestion and that its average capacity without distention is not more than three pints. The bookful Theory of the process of digestion is too long to be entered upon. And for the present purpose it is only necessary to state that the principal part of this process is performed by the means of the solvent powers of the gastric juice, supposed to be secreted during mastication and thrown off from the coats of the stomach by the stimulus of the food. In a healthy individual it is found to exist proportionally to the wants of the system —

The undue disturbance of this secretion is the "fons et origo" of Dyspepsia, and the causes of this disturbance may be considered as Physical and Mental.

Healthy digestion does not depend so much upon the quality as quantity of food and the manner in which it is taken. It is perfectly preposterous to say that man should live upon one article of diet to the exclusion of all others. And if any one claims that the particular regimen which he follows is that best

adapted to the nutriment of the human body. The question at once arises whether God intended him to dictate a rule or system for all to follow. Individuals differ so entirely from each other that it is in vain to attempt the construction of an universal standard.

Although it is true that we are so constituted as to exist upon almost any food, experience teaches as well as the form and structure of our organs, that vigorous health of mind and body are best promoted by a mixed diet. The different parts of the human frame cannot obtain their nutrition and perfection from one and the same substance.

Thus, supposing it possible for a man to exist on Fat alone, he would become a huge mountain of adipose without possessing a single muscular fibre to move his unwieldy body—

By repeated experiments it has been proved that the stomach in health is governed by laws of order and regularity & that when these laws are transgressed its functions are impaired and its offices imperfectly performed. These laws are altogether broken by eating at any and every

hour of the Night & of the day. and the consequences of their violation are evinced in the continued debility and the frequent pains and aches of the Dyspeptic. If this habit is pernicious to the healthy so also is that of dosing ^{at irregular periods} with Blisters and Purgs. Those suffering under acute disease It would weaken the constitution of a man in health and it is certain to shorten the days of the invalid.

Overdistention of the stomach is an exciting cause of Dyspepsia. Supposing that it is capable of digesting 16 ounces of food at a time it is evident that if 20 are taken overdistention results. Some of the food remains partly or wholly undigested and for a longer period than is compatible with the healthy state of the vessels or its secretions. To avoid eating too much food at a meal the first feeling of satiety should be noticed. At that moment relish for food seems to cease, but if eating is persisted in, the uneasy sensations which it produces may be mistaken for appetite and overdistention follows as a matter of course. The dietic rule of Dr Franklin was a good one. Always to rise from the table with an appetite.

The occupation and business habits of an individual should govern the quantity and quality of his food.

The man of sedentary ^{and chaotic} life cannot with impunity take as much food or the same food as the hard working farmer whose system is invigorated by healthful exercise.

Time and season also should influence the quantity of Diet. Eight hours in 24 is abundant for any man to sleep, and he who in winter retires at 8, breakfasts at 9, dines at 1, and eats again at 6, who hugs the stove all day, talks potiches and scandal in preference to taking free exercise in the open air is surely in danger of Syphilis, if he does not diminish the quantity of his food.

The habitual late riser should trouble the butcher but for little meat and just in proportion as he sleeps more than Nature requires should he abstain from the dishes of a plentiful table. Those who live on high seasoned food and take but little out door exercise in Winter may imagine that they are laying up a store of vital energies for the time when they shall be most required but they mistake for though the period may be delayed the hour will come when

Nature in courtly ways will mark her displeasure
of their Epicurean propensities - I have intimated
that a plain simple diet is preferable to any other
and in proof of this point I might refer to the
early records of mankind - In the 18th Chapter of
Genesis we find a brief account - of the repast which
Abraham provided for the three Angels when they
visited him in the plains of Mamre - The Holy
Records states that when he saw them he ran and
welcomed ^{them} with all the signs of primitive hospitality
And when he had thus welcomed them he hastened
to Sarah his wife and bade her "Make ready quickly
three measures of fine meal, knead it and make cakes
upon the hearth". While he ran unto the ~~hearth~~ and
fetched a calf tender and good and gave it unto a
young man and he hastened and dressed it." This with
the addition of Butter and milk. Abraham set before
the Angels to eat. Again in the ix Chapter of Genesis
when Lot entertained two Angels. it is said that "Lot
made a feast and did bake unleavened bread, and they
did eat." These feasts for angels so simple in
their preparation would be considered but poor fare

for men in modern times. In the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer we meet with many accounts of like simplicity.

Proofs of the advantage of simple diet so far as longevity is concerned are found in our common poor houses. It is often remarked that paupers live to a very great age, that old and sickly constitutions patched up while more lasted, are recruited under a plain and systematic fare. They thrive wonderfully upon the town charge and last long to the exceeding disappointment of the lowest bidder —

Eating hastily is almost as hurtful as eating intemperately. The appetite subsides only in proportion as the gastric juice becomes mixed with the food and as it were neutralized by it. When one eats rapidly the food is imperfectly masticated and insalivated, which is a very important process for it to undergo before it reaches the stomach. Time is not given for a due admixture of it with the gastric secretion and the sensation of hunger continues so that eating is not desisted from until the stomach is overdistended. On the contrary when the food is duly ~~masticated~~ comminuted by mastication and

insalivation the gastric fluid acts on its minutest particles and the appetite abates before this distended effect follows -

A cheerful state of mind at all times and especially at the time of eating, is greatly to be desired. An eminent Physician observes that people should never eat when in ill humor for it paralyzes the stomach brings on a torpor of the feelings and disposes to melancholy and low spirits.

Therefore the Italians have an excellent custom, for they at the time of their repasts take great delight in listening to the melodious warbling of birds or the entrancing strains of the Viol -

There are many other habits operating in favor of Indigestion which cannot be considered in this essay - Nor does it belong to our subject to look very closely at the mental causes of Dyspepsia.

For when the mind is disordered the whole animal system is deranged. One evident cause however we will mention and that is the fear of becoming Dyspeptic. It is very unfortunate for some persons to know that they have a stomach

for although they cannot for the life of them
tell what sort of a thing it is or where it is
situated. yet refer every ache or pain. especially
if they have read any work on Dyspepsia. to that
organ. and by their constant anxiety bring on
Melancholia. Dyspepsia & perhaps Phthisis -

I once knew a man, (you could not call him
"mens sana in sano corpore"). but he was a man
who after reading Halsted, found it necessary to
go to the springs for his health and resort to baskets
of Pills for imaginary complaints. which in time
became real difficulties - Halsted on Dyspepsia and
Grahams Lectures. perhaps have ~~made~~ more Dyspeptics
than those Physicians ever cured or could cure were
their practice as successful as Esculapious or their
age equal to that of Methuselah. The manner in
which the minds of people are wrought upon by
publications coming either from extreme Regulars
or apurging quacks is painfully witnessed every
day - But I will only add that if mankind in
general were less susceptible of imposition -
if they were sometimes ignorant of their own

ills and organization-if they would eat but three
regular meals a day and take with moderation and
slowness varieties of animal and vegetable food.
There would be left employment for the honorable
gentlemen here present and for their brethren
of the Profession.

A. C. Matthews.

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